

Legislative Council

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CHILD PROTECTION

The Hon. A. BRESSINGTON (16:09): I seek leave to make a brief explanation before asking the minister representing the Minister for Education a question about child protection.

Leave granted.

The Hon. A. BRESSINGTON: About two weeks ago, I was contacted by a father who has two children who attend a public primary school. He has made allegations that these children are neglected and are literally starving. While speaking with him, I rang the counsellor of the school and put my concerns to him, and the counsellor of the school confirmed that he also had serious and grave concerns for the welfare of the children. I asked the school counsellor if we could organise a meeting, and he said yes. Later, I received a phone call from him saying that it was necessary for me to put the request for a meeting in writing to make it all official, so I did that and emailed it off to him, only to receive a response stating that the meeting could not go ahead until he had received permission from the minister.

In the meantime, the father has been back to the school, and I have organised for a psychological evaluation of the children. The problem is that the father cannot get any information from the school, and the psychologist is unable, through the freedom of information provisions involving the father, to get any information from the school about the children and their performance, and all the rest of it. The counsellor has also made the comment that if he gets involved in this he is afraid of losing his job.

It appears—and this is an assumption—that no mandatory reports have been made about the welfare of these two children. The father made the comment yesterday that last week they returned to him, on his turn of care, with mouldy bread and rotten milk in their schoolbags that he had packed the week before. So, obviously they have had no lunches cut for them in that week. Indeed, the counsellor has made the comment that they are undernourished and have quite often gone to school and said they have not eaten for up to two days. My questions are:

1. Will the minister clarify why the school counsellor would be instructed by the principal to seek the minister's permission to speak with me? I have spoken with the minister about this and she said it is not necessary, so why would the counsellor receive that instruction from the principal?

2. Will the minister intervene to ensure that information is released and mandatory reports are made to ensure the safety and wellbeing of these two children?

The Hon. G.E. GAGO (Minister for State/Local Government Relations, Minister for the Status of Women, Minister for Consumer Affairs, Minister for Government Enterprises, Minister Assisting the Minister for Transport, Infrastructure and Energy) (16:11): I thank the honourable member for her important questions and will refer them to the relevant minister in another place and bring back a response.